

HOW TO... Make a video for YouTube

Want to be a star but don't want to work hard to be one? Ben Pitt explains how you can achieve fame – even infamy – quickly and easily using a camera, Windows Movie Maker and the international platform of YouTube

The phenomenal success of YouTube has proved you don't need a huge budget to have a hit movie on your hands. Amateur film-makers are able to reach audiences of thousands, and in some cases, millions. All you need is a good idea, and sometimes not even that. People have become surprise YouTube stars by being charismatic, grumpy or just a bit weird.

You'll definitely need a video camera. A MiniDV camera is the obvious choice (see page 78 for our Labs review of digital camcorders), but if you don't have one the movie mode on your digital camera is good enough. A £15 webcam will suffice if you film within reach of your PC.

There's plenty of great video-editing software available, but you can achieve excellent results with Windows Movie Maker, which is bundled with Windows XP. The latest version is included with Service Pack 2; if you don't have this installed, see www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/sp2. Movie Maker can capture from MiniDV cameras, webcams and analogue camcorders hooked up to a capture card, and can import video files from digital cameras in AVI and MPEG formats, but not QuickTime.

You'll need a topic for your broadcast. You might decide to make a video diary or a conspiracy theory exposé. The only limitations are that YouTube videos must be no longer than 10 minutes and must not contain copyrighted or offensive material; see www.youtube.com/t/community_guidelines for details.

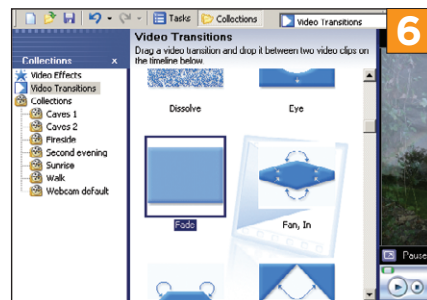
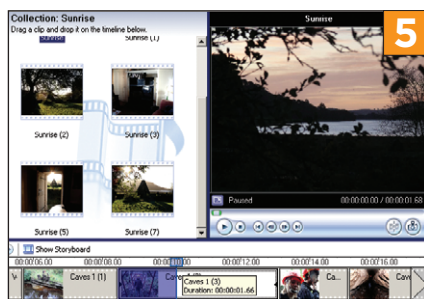
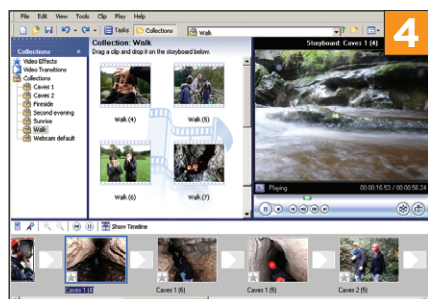
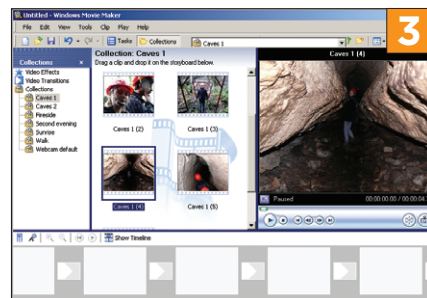
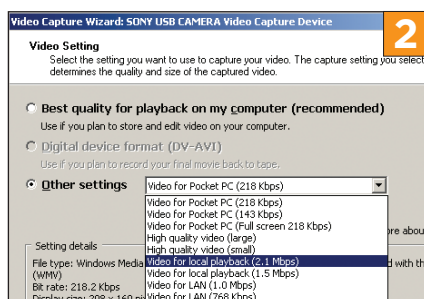
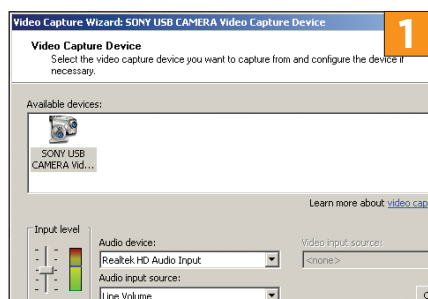
1 Once you've shot your masterpiece, the first task is to get it on your PC. Launch Windows Movie Maker from the Start menu; you'll find it in the Programs list or tucked inside Accessories. Videos and still images from digital cameras can be imported simply by dropping them on to the software. To capture from a video camera or webcam, connect it to the PC via FireWire, USB or analogue video cable. Then select File, Import into Collections. Select your camera or video-capture card from Available Devices and, if necessary, the appropriate Audio device. All MiniDV cameras and some webcams transfer sound down their FireWire or USB connection, but for other devices you'll have to route audio via your sound card's line input. Click Next when you're ready.

2 Pick a name and location on your hard disk to store your captured video. Click Next again to choose your capture-quality settings. The software's default settings are ideal for creating videos for uploading to YouTube, but if you also want to keep higher-quality versions, perhaps to burn to DVD using DVD-authoring software, go for the best quality available. For MiniDV cameras this is the middle option, DV AVI. For webcams and analogue cameras, choose Other settings, Video for local playback (2.1Mbit/s). Click Next again, then use the Start Capture and Stop Capture buttons to record your video. When that's done, click Finish.

3 The chances are that you'll have captured much more than you plan to use, so the next task is to get rid of the bits you don't want. Don't be too ruthless at this stage as you're not deciding the exact edit points, just the bits you can definitely discard. If you have captured a number of different scenes as a single capture file, this is also the time to split them into individual scenes. Windows Movie Maker does this automatically during the capture process, but you'll need to do it manually for clips imported from your hard disk.

Click on the Collections button to show a list of the video files you've captured and imported. Click on each one in turn, followed by the Play button under the Preview window to watch it. When you identify the beginning or end of a good or bad bit of footage, hit Pause (or the spacebar on your keyboard) followed by the Split button, second from the right under the preview window. By repeatedly doing this, you can divide each video file into good and bad sections, whereupon you can simply select the unwanted bits and remove them by pressing the Delete key. If you find that you've split a clip at the wrong point, select the two fragments and type Ctrl-M to recombine them.

4 Next comes the fun bit: ordering your clips on the storyboard. This is achieved by dragging them from the centre on to the panels at the bottom. Playback runs from left to right,



so arrange your clips as if you're creating a storyboard or comic strip of images. You can drop clips between two others and rearrange them simply by dragging them. This step is easy, but it's the most important in terms of creativity, so make sure that you spend plenty of time on it. Try to create a narrative with the camera, introducing a scene and the characters within it as if you were telling a story. Don't be afraid to get rid of any clips that aren't critical to your story because keeping your piece short will help boost your ratings.

5 You now need to find the precise points where each clip starts and stops. This isn't possible in storyboard mode, so switch to the timeline using the Show Timeline button. Here, each clip is represented by a horizontal bar, with its width proportional to the clip's length in time. Decide on a clip you want to trim, zoom in using the magnifying glass button and drag the edges inwards to trim it. Use the arrow buttons below the preview window to move along the timeline one frame at a time; this can help you locate precise edit points.

6 As you're fine-tuning the length of each clip, consider whether you want to use any transitions. A transition is a way of overlapping two clips. The most common type is a dissolve (Windows Movie Maker calls it Fade) in which one clip blends smoothly into another, but there are plenty of others from curling pages to 3D explosions. To see what's on offer, click on Video Transitions in the Collections panel, select a transition and hit the spacebar to see it in action. The more elaborate transitions are fun, but they can also take the viewer's attention away from the subject matter.

To add a transition, drag it from the transition library to between two clips on the timeline or storyboard. The storyboard makes it a little easier to organise transitions, but the timeline allows you to adjust their length by dragging either end. Adding a transition will shorten the overall length of your video as you're overlapping clips, so you may want to lengthen clips slightly to compensate.

7 Just above the Transitions button, you'll find Video Effects. This isn't Windows Movie Maker's strongest area, but if you want to add a blur or watercolour effect, you can do so simply by dropping it on to a clip. Some effects can look a little tacky but the fade-in and fade-out effects are useful, particularly for dividing longer projects into chapters. You can add multiple effects to a clip, and remove them by right-clicking a clip and selecting Video Effects.

8 We like the slow-motion effect, but while slow video can look poignant and romantic, slowed-down audio sounds creepy. You'll need to look elsewhere for the soundtrack for these sections. One option is to add some music, although it needs to be your own or that of an agreeable friend if you're going to post it on YouTube. Import a Wav, MP3 or WMA file by dropping it on to one of the Collections and dragging it on to the Audio/Music track on the timeline. Alternatively, you can plug a microphone into your sound card, click the microphone icon and Start Narration to add a voice-over narration to your video.

As you build up the audio elements of your video, you'll need to adjust their relative volume. Click the fader icon to set the overall balance of the video clips' soundtrack against the narration and music. Then adjust the level of individual clips by right-clicking them and selecting Volume. The Fade In and Fade Out options are particularly effective when coupled with the video fade effects.

9 To add text to your video, select Titles and Credits from the Tools menu. There are various options to insert text before, after or during a clip, but usually the best approach is to find the point on the timeline where you want the text to start and select Add title on the selected clip. After typing your text, click the buttons to format the font and select an animation style. Initially, you'll see only your text over a Windows desktop image, but once you click Done it will appear over your video, whereupon you can trim its length by using the Timeline view.

10 When your production is perfected, it's time to render it as a single video file. Select File, Save Movie File, then choose My computer as the Movie Location. Click Next, give a name and location for your file and click Next again. The following page is where you define the export-quality settings. The default option is fine for playback on your PC, but isn't ideal for uploading to YouTube. Click Show more choices, Other settings: and select Video for broadband (512 Kbit/s). Click Next to begin rendering.

11 Before you can upload your video to YouTube, you need to set up an account. Go to www.youtube.com and click the Sign Up button. You'll need to respond to a confirmation email, so make sure you give a genuine email address. You'll also need to come up with a unique username, which must include only letters and numbers.

Once you've registered, you can add details for your channel; this is equivalent to a TV channel, to which other YouTube users can subscribe to catch all your future video broadcasts. You can also fill your channel with information about yourself, as YouTube doubles as a social-networking site in the style of MySpace. For now, though, let's concentrate on uploading a video.

12 Click on the My Account button followed by Upload New Video. Give your video a title and a short description, and add tags to help people find your video using YouTube's search facility. These tags are visible on the page, so don't include anything you don't want your viewers to see. Choose a category from options such as People or Sports, specify the language and click Continue.

On the next page, click Browse, locate your rendered video on your hard disk and click Upload Video. After a few minutes, you'll get a chance to confirm the details for your video and decide whether you want others to be able to comment on or rate it. You'll also be given a link to send to friends and family, so they can view your video, forward it to their friends and help begin your career as an internet movie star. 

